



# *Grand Lodge Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Nebraska*

301 N. Cotner Blvd. • Lincoln, Nebraska 68505-2315  
(402) 475-4640 • Fax (402) 475-4736 • www.glna.org

---

## **Grand Master's Edict #5 Revised Ritual Exceptions for Degrees during COVID-19 Social Distancing Effective August 14, 2020**

The original “Ritual Exceptions for Degrees during COVID-19 Social Distancing” that was included with Grand Master’s Edict #5, effective August 1, 2020, is rescinded and replaced by the “Ritual Exceptions for Degrees during COVID-19 Social Distancing”, dated August 14, 2020 and is effective August 14, 2020 until further notice.

Following release of Grand Master’s Edict #5, it was recommended that the Committee on Nebraska Work review the “**Ritual Exceptions for Degrees during COVID-19 Social Distancing.**” I requested the Committee review the **Ritual Exceptions**. The philosophy of the Committee is that one does not simply join the Masonic Fraternity, but experiences it from a very personal standpoint and the **Ritual Exceptions**, as previously published, diminished the candidate experience too much. The philosophy of the Committee and their input resulted in several adjustments to the **Ritual Exceptions** which have been incorporated into the revised **Ritual Exceptions** that follow.

Sincerely and fraternally yours,

Ronald D. Stites  
Grand Master



## **Ritual Exceptions for Degrees during COVID 19 Social Distancing** **August 14, 2020**

*Note: For health and safety reasons, these exceptions apply for lodge degree practices and degree conferrals, as well as practicing and proving lodge proficiency. Reference is specifically made to prior Edicts as to wearing of masks, social distancing, and especially to each individual's responsibility in his conduct and determination as to attend or avoid meeting and the manner in which he complies with prior Edicts. All Officers should wear masks for their safety and the safety of all present – also as an example for all in attendance.*

**Opening:** The Deacons will wear masks when purging and collecting the pass.

### **Collecting the pass:**

- Deacons step up on pedestals, but do not give grip. They softly say the password.
- Deacons stop in front of brethren. The grip is not used. The brethren softly say the word without going mouth to ear.
- SD steps up, no grip, and softly gives the word to the WM from a short distance.
- WM rises to take it, communicates to SW, then sits.

**The wearing of CLEAN LAUNDERED CANDIDATE ATTIRE is an important feature of each degree – the candidate enters with no worldly goods and dressed in the initiatory/candidate clothing – a dramatic message of humbleness and manner of being received which is reinforced by lectures.**

(EA<sup>o</sup>) The Worshipful Master or Secretary should inform the candidate in advance that the proper attire is a sports coat/jacket long trousers (no shorts or cut-offs) The SD should wear a shirt/coat with long sleeves for the degree to protect the candidate. The SD and Committee will maintain proper distancing when examining the candidate. The SD should explain to the candidate that some exceptions to normal degree procedures will be required to conform to CDC guidelines relative to social distancing. Gloves may be used. The candidate shall be advised that he will be blindfolded (be sure to use a disposable liner over the candidates eyes, or a tissue) and that our ritual and degrees involve some normal hand to hand contact for guidance and teaching and in each such incidence we will take time to sanitize hands before proceeding to the next step.

The candidate will be asked at the time of scheduling the degree if he is willing to wear a mask and be advised that all lodge members are requested to be masked and with all officers mandated to be masked. If he is unwilling to comply, the degree will not proceed.

(All <sup>o</sup>) To conform to ritual the candidate will wear freshly laundered initiatory clothing arranged in the proper manner; barefoot or shod as per ritual. Reminder, he will wear a mask. The SD may wear gloves while conducting the candidate. When gloves are worn, they cannot come in contact

with other surfaces, to avoid contamination. Gloves are easily contaminated – as an alternative sanitize hands, gloved or not, after any and all hand to hand contact or contact with surfaces. Have hand sanitizer at every station. Designate one of the Stewards, or someone on the sideline, to dispense sanitizer for candidate and any officer after all hand contact.

**(All °)** The Stewards will wear masks and use sanitizers prior to and after handling the candidate.

**(EA °)** The WM shall place his hand on the candidate's head when he questions him as to in whom do you place your trust. The WM will take the candidate by the right hand to help him rise. Each will then sanitize hands with designated sideliner applying the sanitizer before proceeding.

**(All °)** During circumambulation the Wardens and WM will place their hands on the candidate's shoulder after which they will sanitize their hands. The SD will softly communicate the pass ascending the platforms in the South, West, and East. The Wardens will wear masks when speaking to the candidate at their stations.

**(All °)** To teach how to approach the East, the SW will instruct the candidate and will guide him as usual (followed by hand sanitizing of SW and candidate before the SW returns to his station). The SD will step up and report as usual.

**(All °)** The WM may wear gloves and will wear a mask when giving the obligation. In giving the obligation, the WM may step obliquely just left or right of the center of the altar facing slightly away from candidate so the candidate is at reduced risk of droplets escaping the WM's mask and projecting into the candidate's face. The WM will move the candidate's hands and turn up pages of Bible as set out in the ritual and afterwards sanitize his hands. When the WM asks the candidate what he desires he will touch his head as set out in the ritual and once again sanitize.

**(All °)** The WM will teach the grips and words as set out in the ritual. WM takes hand and orders candidate to arise. As above, the candidate and WM sanitize hands before leaving altar.

**(All °)** Social distancing should be considered when the lines between the altar and the East are formed. Perhaps not more than three Brothers in each line.

**(EA °)** The WM may wear gloves and will wear a mask when presenting the apron.

**(All °)** During the presentation of the working tools, the WM will not hand them to the candidate. WM will show each, place on the pedestal and then pick up and hold each individually as he explains meaning one by one.

**(All °)** For the lecture, the chairs for the SD and candidate should have appropriate separation.

**(All °)** The brother giving the Charge will wear a mask when presenting.

(All<sup>o</sup>) After closing the lodge, the WM should remind the brethren to practice social distancing when congratulating the candidate. (No handshakes, possibly use a hand-over-heart gesture.)

### **Additional items for FC degree**

1. When presenting the working tools the WM should visually present them at the beginning and then set them on the pedestal until each use is explained. This eliminates constantly switching between tools with each explanation. The WM sanitizes his hands after the candidate leaves the East.
2. The SD (the Staircase lecturer) will wear a mask and should guide the candidate by placing his hand on his back/shoulder and suggesting the movement forward.
3. On the way to the Middle Chamber, the JW and SW may physically touch the SD to give the grip for the passes, and both they and the SD will sanitize their hands immediately afterwards.

### **Additional items for MM degrees (Second Section)**

1. The WM will as set out in the ritual shake the candidate's hand for assurance when saying "Go now.....". Upon reaching the altar the candidate's hands will be sanitized before the SD advises him he will again be blindfolded. (Again, use a new liner or tissue under the blindfold.)
2. The Ruffians will wear masks and will grasp the candidate's shirt/coat, but should stay at arm's length and not use mouth-to-ear for demanding information.
3. No more than 6 brethren should be on the canvas and all should be wearing masks. They should socially distance themselves until just before needed, and immediately return to their seats after they have finished their duties. The march will go the normal three circles in the West before lowering the canvas.
4. The funeral procession should be the maximum that can be positioned in the lines in the West and still maintain social distancing. Suggest no more than two Brothers in each line.
5. KS and the GSW will wear a mask and may wear gloves to accomplish their duties at the gravesite. The brethren in the lines will wear masks. KS should give the word only once, release the candidate's hand, and not physically repeat the 5 points when giving the explanation. Before returning to stations, candidate and all who had hand contact will sanitize.
6. The Secretary will provide a sanitized pen for the candidate to sign the Bylaws.

## **Phase II: Nebraska Lodge Guidance & Directives**

The following **Guidance, Directives, and Ritual Exceptions** have been developed for Phase II allowing Nebraska lodges to resume degree/ritual work during the Coronavirus Pandemic. The **Guidance, Directives, and Ritual Exceptions** will be updated when deemed appropriate.

Remain vigilant and monitor national, state, and local announcements of changes to restrictions and recommendations. While the Guidance, Directives, and Ritual Exceptions being provided covers a wide range of topics, it is impossible to address every situation lodges will face. When there is an absence of direction for unique circumstances, it is recommended that lodges refer to local restrictions, plan accordingly, and let common sense prevail.

### **Guidance**

- Community spread of SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) is occurring which poses a risk to the health and welfare of all. Therefore, members voluntarily assume all risks related to exposure to COVID-19 by attending Blue Lodge meetings/activities.
- **If a lodge feels uncomfortable about having a meeting, or activity, or degree conferral, then do not do it. No penalty will be imposed for the decision.**
- **Individual attendance is voluntary for lodge meetings, activities, and degree conferrals and decisions to attend/participate are personal.**
- If a brother has symptoms of COVID-19, or has family members with COVID-19, or has knowingly been exposed to COVID-19 he should remain at home.
- Perform a risk assessment of the lodge building. Pay specific attention to areas of high traffic, frequently touched surfaces, and meeting rooms where efforts are needed to maximize sanitation and allow appropriate social distancing.
- This Guidance and subsequent Direction are the minimum. Worshipful Masters are allowed to establish stricter restrictions if they wish.

### **Directives**

#### **Lodge Preparation**

- Develop a plan for cleaning and disinfection. Note, if the space is vacant for 7 days or longer, routine cleaning methods will suffice in most situations.
- Officers will familiarize themselves and comply with local and state restrictions regarding size of gatherings, safe distancing, and use of masks and gloves prior to notifying members of meetings and/or conferring degrees.
- Have hand sanitizer available at the entrance of the lodge and in the lodge room. Verify soap and water is available in all restrooms and wash areas.

#### **Lodge Meetings**

- Meetings may be opened in any degree. For collecting the pass comply with the below Ritual Exceptions.

- Brethren are to wear masks in the lodge building. Once the lodge is opened, and there is a minimum of 6 feet between attendees, the Worshipful Master will announce if masks will be worn or removed. If a brother chooses to keep his mask on, he may do so.
- Upon arrival, brethren are to wash their hands with soap and water or use hand sanitizer.
- Avoid shaking hands.
- The general use of gloves is optional. If gloves are worn they should not be cloth.
- Pre- and/or post-meeting meals, snacks, refreshments, and social time are discouraged and left to the discretion of the Worshipful Master.
- Maintain social distancing before, during, and after each meeting.
- Email all communications, minutes, agendas, and reports to brethren prior to the meeting. Post a copy outside of the lodge room. Do not provide individual copies for brethren.
- Balloting should be done with paper ballots. The appointed tellers should either wear disposable gloves or use hand sanitizer while distributing ballots and after counting ballots.
- The Secretary will maintain an accurate record of attendees for potential contact tracking.

### **Lodge Activities**

- Investigating committees are authorized provided the committee members and petitioner are comfortable with the meeting.
- Mentoring and proficiency for individuals and round tables are authorized. If social distancing cannot be maintained, masks are strongly encouraged.
- Degree Conferral: Refer to and comply with the below Ritual Exceptions.
- Lodge social functions and fundraising activities are authorized. If food is served as part of a social function or fundraiser, conduct the event using the same restrictions as restaurants. Comply with local and state restrictions and at a minimum masks and gloves are to be worn during all food preparation, ordering, packaging, and delivery.